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RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6705
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 001018

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: WORST LTTE ATTACK ON CIVILIANS SINCE
2002 CEASEFIRE PROMPTS LIMITED MILITARY RESPONSE AND
LOCALIZED ETHNIC BACKLASH

REF: A. COLOMBO 1008

- [1](#)B. COLOMBO 1006
- [1](#)C. COLOMBO 998
- [1](#)D. COLOMBO 990

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Lunstead. 1.4(b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Following a presumed LTTE mine attack on a crowded civilian bus near North-central Vavuniya on the morning of June 15 that killed at least 64 people (Ref A), the Sri Lanka military launched limited retaliation on LTTE targets south of Trincomalee, and Mullaitivu, headquarters of the Sea Tigers, along the northeast coast. This claymore attack is the second in the recent past (following the April 12 bombing of a Sinhalese market in Trincomalee) on a purely civilian target. The Foreign Ministry asked the international community to issue statements of condemnation. The LTTE attack on a civilian target and the consequential military action represents a fairly significant step toward pre-Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) rules of engagement. End summary.

LTTE Landmine Targets School Children

[1](#)2. (C) At approximately 8:00 a.m. on June 15, a powerful mine presumably set by the LTTE destroyed a civilian bus crowded with commuters, school children, one Sri Lanka Army (SLA) soldier and three Home Guard soldiers. A demining source with HALO Trust told RSO the road on which the blast occurred is in poor condition, and the packed bus would have been one of the only forms of transport available. Military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe added that the "huge" blast is the worst single act of violence since the GSL and LTTE signed the Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) in February 2002.

[1](#)3. (C) In response to the bus bombing, Brigadier Samarasinghe confirmed that two air force jets bombed Mullaitivu, headquarters of the Sea Tigers on the coast southeast of Jaffna, defining it as a limited deterrent action.

Military Retaliation, Reports of Ethnic Unrest

¶4. (C) Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) spokesperson Thorfinnur Omarsson told poloff on June 15 that "the situation is very grave at the moment." He also confirmed reports of military action in Sampoor, Trincomalee district - a Naval attack by the 22 Division and possibly ground shelling as well - where monitors will arrive soon on the scene. (Note: Omarsson took over for Helen Olifsdottir on June 12. End note.) The SLMM does not have monitors in Mullaitivu. Monitors had been at the site of the bus attack for several hours, Omarsson said, and believed the bus had suffered two separate blasts.

¶5. (C) Trincomalee Human Rights lawyer Fr. V. Yogeshwaran told pol FSN on June 15 that ethnic riots erupted in Trincomalee town following the bus explosion and subsequent military action. He said "five persons had been cut up." Muttur Hospital confirmed one dead upon arrival at approximately 13:45 June 15. In Anuradhapura, a predominately Sinhalese town near the site of the bus explosion, two Tamil-owned shops have been burnt, according to a BBC stringer. Foreign Secretary Palihakkara stated that elected leaders and authorities have been sent to trouble spots to subdue the possibility of ethnically motivated outbreaks of violence.

Tit for Tat

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¶6. (C) In addition to the military actions mentioned above, the GSL appears to be taking small acts of revenge against the LTTE for their actions in Oslo last week. On the evening of June 13, Norwegian Ambassador Brattskar called Ambassador from Oslo. Brattskar said that the Norwegians had been notified that the GSL would not provide helicopter transport from Colombo to Kilinocchi for the returning LTTE delegation, as promised earlier, but would only help them up to the Line of Control crossing point at Omanthai, in GSL-controlled area. The Norwegians would then have the responsibility of transporting them safely to Kilinocchi. At this point in time, the LTTE delegation was in Switzerland about to take off for Sri Lanka. The Government proposal was, of course, totally unacceptable to the Norwegians. After many frantic phone calls and discussions with Foreign Minister Samaraweera, who was visiting Norway at that time, the GSL eventually agreed to provide the transport all the way to Kilinocchi.

¶7. (C) Norwegian Charge' told Ambassador June 15 that when the LTTE arrived in Colombo, the GSL also reneged on earlier promises of swift processing at the airport. Instead, the Tiger delegation stood around for some time in the public areas and were subjected to a search of their luggage. When some questionable items were found, Customs then searched everything--opening shampoo bottles, etc. After several hours the delegation made it through immigration and customs and was then flown to Kilinocchi.

¶8. (C) SLMM spokesperson Omarsson told poloff on June 15 that the LTTE made "no objection" about the monitors from EU-member states who the SLMM had "purposefully" assigned to accompany the LTTE back to Kilinocchi.

GSL Urges Action From International Community

¶9. (C) Foreign Secretary Palihakkara, Peace Secretariat chief Palitha Kohona, and Deputy Defense Secretary Admiral

Sandigiri addressed Heads of Missions June 15 on the LTTE bus attack and subsequent "limited Security Forces operations to let the LTTE know these deplorable acts of terrorism have a price." Sandigiri confirmed the forces had carried out an air attack in Mullaitivu and an artillery attack in Sampoor on LTTE Sea Tiger targets. He told Ambassador that neither target co-housed civilian populations.

¶10. (C) Kohona stated that the GSL's "unambiguous preference" is still a negotiated settlement, although the LTTE is clearly trying to incite backlash against Tamil civilians in the majority-Sinhalese south. Palihakarra asked the international community to strongly condemn the LTTE attack and urge the Tigers to stop violence and explore avenues to political discourse immediately.

Comment and Action Request

¶11. (C) Comment. This attack is the second since April 12 by the LTTE against a purely civilian target. Kebethigollewa is an ethnically mixed area. Moreover, it is the deadliest attack since the Ceasefire came into effect in 2002. A Tiger spokesman has denied LTTE responsibility, but there can be little doubt the Tigers did it. The bus attack seems clearly another effort by the Tigers to widen the racial division between Sinhalese and Tamil and promote a civilian backlash against Tamils. End comment.

¶12. (C) ACTION REQUEST. Post recommends Washington issue a statement condemning the LTTE attack on a civilian target and calling on both sides to stop violence and return to negotiations. Suggested text follows:

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"The United States strongly condemns the June 15 terrorist bombing of a civilian bus in north central Sri Lanka that resulted in the deaths of more than 60 innocent people and injuries to dozens more. This horrific and unprovoked act bears all the hallmarks of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and is another clear violation of the Ceasefire Agreement the LTTE claims to uphold. The United States calls once again upon the LTTE to renounce terror and enter into direct negotiations with the Sri Lankan government on strengthening the ceasefire and settling the conflict. We call on both parties to seek ways to end the violence and return to the table." End statement.
LUNSTEAD